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Family Planning Aspirations Among Youth in Higher Education: A Study in Islamabad, Pakistan

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Abstract

Youth and family planning is a burning topic in Pakistan, where the dynamics of population and the transformation of social values are altering the traditional mindsets. This study examined the perceptions and behaviors of university students in Pakistan regarding family planning with a focus on Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. Based on the life course theory, data were collected from 385 M.Phil and master's students using a stratified random sample technique that considered their gender, degree level, and faculty. The quantitative technique is employed to examine family planning, the role of institutions in decision-making, individual attitudes towards the practice, and future planning associated with family formation, utilizing descriptive and inferential analysis techniques for data analysis. Key findings show that the two main factors influencing desires for smaller families and postponing marriage are economic pressures and educational attainment. The study also found significant distinctions between students in urban and rural areas, with the urban showing a greater propensity for lower family sizes. Despite these differences, both genders and student groups indicated a broad understanding of and support for family planning principles. They also stressed the importance of completing education and

achieving financial stability before starting a family, while also advocating for birth spacing. These findings reveal the necessity of having specific policies that can help the youth to align their family planning aspirations with their educational and economic goals.

Keywords: Family planning, Life course theory, Youth attitudes, Parenthood anticipation, educational influence, Marriage timing.

1. Introduction

Every society views its youth as its core, UNDP (2022) reports that Pakistan has the highest recorded youth population ever. According to the United States Department of the Survey (2003), the average age of a first marriage has climbed for both men and women, from 23 to 27 years old. For women, it has increased to 25 years old. Numerous studies indicate that, in contrast to previous generations, there is a clear trend toward younger people getting married later in life (Barich and Bielby 2022). According to Abbas (2012), the family is viewed as the supreme authority in Pakistan and has significant influence over decisions about an individual's intended future course of life. Youth typically grow up and reside in families that have already been created, most frequently in marriage or biological families. Sons who marry typically stay in the family home and live with their parents. However, among college and university students, especially those who are impacted by Western standards and values, this trend is changing (Ali & Hassan, 2023). It seems that Pakistani society is going through a transitional period as university students are becoming more independent and proactive in making their own decisions about getting married and starting families (Javed & Hussain, 2022).

The increasing age at which people marry in Pakistan, especially women, is one of the most significant demographic shifts. Between 1991 and 2013, the average age at marriage rose dramatically, from 21.5 to 23.3 years for females and from 26.5 to 27.1 years for males (Quershi 2020). This change has become a cross-sectional phenomenon and is not exclusive to any group (Shah & Ali, 2019). There are probably several reasons behind this increasing trend. The growing ability of young adults, particularly women, to choose their partners is a major contributing factor (Akhtar & Siddiqui, 2023). Women who are more independent in their father's household tend to be more independent in their marriages, which promotes open communication and more

freedom in family planning decisions (Gilani & Khan 2020). Changes in family sizes and fertility preferences are also being influenced by this newly discovered agency and enhanced communication dynamics within marriages (Haq & Aziz, 2022).

Although childbirth is still complicated and entwined with socioeconomic realities, there has been a notable shift in attitudes toward it, according to a recent poll on household management in Pakistan (Population Committee, 2018) (Zeba&Irum, 2018). Younger respondents (those between the ages of 16 and 20) particularly preferred reduced family sizes, pointing to a possibly revolutionary trend. Gender, geography, and educational background are not factors that affect this positive attitude toward home management; individuals with and without formal education, as well as those in rural and urban settings, all exhibited it (Shahid & Shah, 2018). Young people also showed a fair degree of awareness about birth spacing and family planning methods, understanding their significance for the health of mothers and children as well as the general well-being and quality of life of families. Moreover, they made it apparent that they intended to use contraception after getting married, suggesting that responsible family planning methods may become more common in the future (Khan & Javed, 2023).

1.2 Factors that Influence Youth Planning

1.2.1 Influence of Socialization

Individual parenting decisions are greatly influenced by socialization, especially when it comes to how they view marriage (Muneer & Hassan, 2022). In Pakistani society, where family expectations and societal conventions play a major role, marriage is essentially seen as a predetermined union, with parents having the final say over whom a child would marry and other matters (Sathar&Kiani, 2016). Due to their lack of agency, young men and women frequently accept their parents' decisions on marriage and starting a family in a passive manner (Khan & Hussain, 2020). According to Iqbal and Ali (2019), the family unit has a significant role in socialization by shaping people's personalities, values, and goals for the future. Pakistani adolescents tend to internalize the stereotypes and expectations about marital customs that have been handed down through the years, especially from elders and members of their close family. Their limited exposure to diverse viewpoints may impede their capacity to consider and pursue alternate marriage and family-oriented life paths (Clark & Ansell, 2012).

1.2.2 Age Gap: Balancing Societal Pressures with Changing Aspirations

In Pakistan, there is frequently a noticeable age difference in the difficulties that young men and women face due to societal expectations surrounding marriage and parenthood (Kiani, 2024). In the past, young males have typically faced less immediate pressure to settle down, whereas young women have faced tremendous pressure to marry young and start families early due to cultural attitudes and worries about staying single (Zeba&Irum, 2018). The historical focus on female domesticity and the persistent stigma attached to lone women, especially after a certain age, are the causes of this discrepancy (Khan & Akhtar, 2023). Positive changes are, nevertheless, starting to show up lately. The strict schedules and expectations around marriage and childbirth have been undermined by Pakistani women's growing involvement in a variety of professions, including business, politics, and education (Nazli& Rahman, 2019). A gradual rebalancing of age pressures and a wider acceptance of delaying marriage and childbearing choices results from women's increasing social and economic independence and a decreasing dread of being single (Shah & Haq, 2020).

1.2.3 Education: Reshaping Marriage and Parenting Choices

In Pakistani culture, cousin marriage has been a thing since ages and it is possible through planned unions within network of extended family (Shaheed & Shah, 2018). In recent years, increasing levels of education of both the sexes have been portrayed as a major factor in changing conventional marriage patterns (Alidina&Khwaja, 2015). Cousin weddings become less likely for young men who are seeking to advance their careers and get better education. Over time their expectations evolve and get married to a partner that shares the Ambition and approaches career goals (Iqbal &Javed, 2022). In her piece, Ali and Khan (2020) state that completing education and entering into the workforce also empowers young women to give up the right to their lives and actively choose the man they'll marry and defer marriage until they feel settled and established within their employment. Their views of ideal partners are shaped by their educational and professional backgrounds, which emphasize qualities like compatibility, shared values, and the ability to work together to create a future together. Remarkably, a national survey in Pakistan found that 35 percent of respondents said they would rather marry a working woman, underscoring the rising recognition and acceptance of women's professional goals (Rashid & Bhatti, 2018). Moreover, when choosing future spouses, both genders show growing occupational preferences. Young men frequently look for partners who have similar careers to

their own; for example, doctors marrying doctors or engineers marrying engineers. This pattern points to a rising demand in marriages for shared professional understanding and support (Javed& Khan, 2023). In the meantime, young ladies look for partners who value their job decisions and provide an atmosphere that supports their professional development and fulfillment (Shahid & Shah, 2018).

1.2.4 Employment: Shaping Marriage and Parenting Choices in the Dynamic Workforce

The United Nations Development Program (2020) reports that Pakistan's young population is rapidly growing, with those aged 15-29 making up the whole workforce and bringing in an additional 4 million each year. This is causing significant changes in marriage and parenting practices. When employment trends are examined, a clear gender gap becomes apparent. Of the young men in the 20–24 age group, 4.7 million are unmarried and working, while 1.5 million are students (Schwiter, 2011). On the other hand, among young women in the same age range, a significant 3.9 million are already married, while just 2.7 million are unmarried and not involved in the workforce or school (Clark & Ansell, 2018).The disparity highlights the pressure from society for young women to put marriage and starting a family before their professional goals (Khan & Ali, 2023). Positive change is being sparked by growing recognition of the dual advantages of female employment, though. Financial independence gives women more agency and decision-making authority within the family, as well as the ability to contribute to the family economy (Ashraf & Shah, 2019). Parenting responsibilities and childrearing techniques may benefit from this renewed voice and acceptance within the family (Iqbal & Hussain, 2022).Additionally, both genders' choice of mate is becoming more and more influenced by career success and professional reputation. Higher-level occupations increase the likelihood of meeting a desirable partner who can help you create a rewarding future together and who has comparable goals (Javed& Khan, 2023). According to Zeba and Irum (2018), there appears to be a growing tendency in marriage decisions that prioritize compatibility, shared goals, and mutual respect. This could result in more fair and cooperative parenting partnerships.

Students from every province in Pakistan participated in this study, which was carried out at Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad. This studyallowed for a thorough understanding of the views held by Pakistani youth in general about family planning and their goals for the future. Considering society through the lens of family planning, a dynamic change that is fuelling a

transformative change in Pakistani society is how the society is changing with the aspirational and dynamic university and college youth (Ali & Hassan, 2023). With this younger population having (Javed& Hussain, 2022) such disparity in their goals in terms of family planning, it is important to explore current attitudes and priorities on family planning. The purpose of this study is to shed light on four main areas through investigation: Trends Evolving (Khan & Akhtar 2023), wherein they evaluate how family planning preferences are changing in Pakistan's diverse provinces. Gender Divide (Iqbal & Hussain 2022), looking at possible differences in opinions among male and female students. Modernization's Effect (Akhtar 2023), which examines the role that socialization and modernization play in shaping aspirations for family planning. And Social Institutions and Agency (Akhtar 2023), exploring how families, educational This study is an attempt to explore these unexplored areas in an effort to explain the family planning dynamics within a generation going through rapid social change. Doing so, it aims to explore new avenues for inclusive and meaningful projects aligned with the values and dreams for a happier and more inclusive future for families across Pakistan.

Literature Review

2.1 Pakistan's Youth and their Significance:

Pakistan's most valuable resource is its young population, which makes up 29% of those between the ages of 15 and 29 and an incredible 64% of those under 30 (UNDP, 2022). In this population, there are 20.4 million teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19, with a virtually equal distribution of genders (10.7 million boys and 9.7 million girls) (Population Committee of Pakistan, 2018). However, there are still difficulties for this age range. Even if the percentage of students enrolled in school increased from 33% to 43% between 2005 and 2018, child marriage is still an issue, having decreased somewhat from 1 million in 2005 to 9.1 lakh in 2015. (Javed& Hussain, 2022). Aged 20 to 24, the elder youth segment is another significant group. This age group had 14.6 million people in 2005 (7.5 million men and 7.1 million women), and by 2015, it had grown to 18.8 million people (9.7 million men and 9.1 million women) (Iqbal & Hussain, 2022). The planning and aims of this group are more intricate and call for a variety of approaches. Zeba and Irum (2018) stress the value of encouraging the development of skills through education, exposure to the media, involvement in sports, and mobile device use. Furthermore, to enable this generation to make plans for a happy future, reproductive health education must be provided,

family planning alternatives be made more widely known, and youngsters be protected from early marriage.

2.2 Adolescence as a Crucible of Change and Family Planning

Adolescence is a crucial stage of life that is characterized by a variety of transformations, including physical, cognitive, sexual, emotional, and social ones. "A time when lifelong health behaviors are shaped, when pathways of opportunity or risk emerge, and when the trajectories of life course begin to take the form" is that of adolescence (McCarthy, Brady, & Hallman, 2016). Numerous elements, including contemporary work cultures, family socialization methods, socioeconomic background, media influences, and varied cultural conventions, influence young people's decisions regarding family planning in the twenty-first century. (Nazli& Rahman, 2019,).

Scholars in the field of life course studies have generally grappled with two main approaches:

Social Institutional Influences: This viewpoint places a strong emphasis on how social institutions affect people's lives. Within this approach, researchers contend that organizations such as businesses, families, and schools organize opportunities and restrictions, influencing people's decisions and life paths (Marshall & Muller, 2019).

Individual Agency and Life Course Construction: This opposing viewpoint concentrates on how people move through the social environment, actively directing their own lives via agency and personal decisions. Supporters of this perspective disagree with the first approach's determinism and contend that people can make their own decisions and choose their routes in life (Schwiter, 2021). There is a consensus among most social scientists, although they differ in their claims, that these two forces work together to shape life course trajectories. The complex interaction between social institutions and the individual agencies shaping young people's attitudes about family planning (Ashraf & Shah, 2019). This equation matters a lot with gender too because socio norm and socio expectation tend to take on a different path for boys and girls. For example, McCarthy and colleagues (2016) noted how guys are subject to social pressures to focus on career progress and earnings capacity, whereas girls might be signposted to acquire prospective security by seeking long term educational prospects. Some of these disparities might increase further due to the traditional roles a woman might assume to be preferably only a homemaker and caretaker of children in the

context of Pakistani society (Shaheed & Shah, 2018), and especially the career aspirations they might suppress owing and the family planning Decisions they may make.

2.3 Anticipating Family Planning: Priorities in Young Adulthood

A major time, it turns out, for making sense of the clumpy web of possibilities for young adults — those school goals and paths and the new capacity of living to become a parent. Karin Schwiter's 2021 research will give insights into unravelling this intricate fabric. In her study, more light is cast on the nuanced interplay of factors that determine young people's choices around parenthood at this key time and in the Swiss and European context. Moreover, Anthony Reynolds' (2020) work helps to provide a more complete picture of this related to sociological aspects of family formation during the transition to adulthood. His lab's research, conducted in many different cultural contexts, focuses on the social forces at work as young people cut a path through the labyrinth of motherhood. Actions between social institutions and individual agencies (Ashraf & Shah, 2019). Gender also matters a lot in this equation because social norms and expectations frequently dictate distinct routes for boys and girls. For instance, guys may experience social pressure to emphasize career progress and earning potential, while girls are often urged to pursue long-term educational aspirations for future security (McCarthy et al., 2016). Traditional gender roles, which are sometimes seen as primarily as homemakers and child caregivers in the context of Pakistani society, can further magnify these disparities, limiting women's career aspirations and influencing their family planning decisions (Shaheed & Shah, 2018).

2.3 Anticipating Family Planning: Understanding Priorities in Young Adulthood

Making sense of the complex web of choices that young adults face, whether it is about their school goals, professional paths, or the growing possibility of becoming parents, turns out to be a pivotal time. Karin Schwiter's comprehensive research in 2021 provides important insights for unraveling this intricate fabric. Her study illuminates the complex dynamics influencing young people's decisions about parenthood during this critical period, with a focus on the Swiss and European contexts. Additionally, Anthony Reynolds's (2020) research offers a more comprehensive viewpoint by exploring the sociological facets of family formation as a person enters adulthood. Reynolds research, which is conducted in a variety of cultural contexts, emphasize the social influences that shape young people's choices as they make their way

through the complex terrain of motherhood. Morgen and Martin (2020) show the importance of economic conditions for the timing of parenthood in Europe. Economic instability and with it, notable delay in child bearing caused by rising youth unemployment. People give priority to having a stable career and enough money before anyone decides he or she is ready to become a husband and wife. The finding of this result is consistent with other research in a broader corpus that the primary factors leading to the decision to postpone motherhood are job advancement, economic stability, and educational attainment. The everyday life of becoming and being a mother is complicated by the interweaving between personal choices, cultural norms, and financial constraints as young women prepare for becoming mothers and motherhood. This investigation shapes out how exactly family planning is truly a complex working of mechanics and it gives smart information concerning how parenting picks are evolving in the current world.

2.4 Filling the Gap: Perspectives of Pakistani Youth.

While previous studies related to Pakistan youth and family planning use an overly generalized view, they do not take into account generational differences in views or decision making. While smaller families and later marriages are becoming more prevalent, we don't fully grasp the specific goals, challenges and features that lead each generation to form its own family. Further work should be done, studying values; changing values; experiences across generations; and preferences to geography and education attainment. Figuring out what has driven each generation in this way starts to shed light on these varied drivers, and starts to let us develop tailored interventions and policies to address the unique needs and goals of each generation, thereby influencing what will be a more prosperous and inclusive future for the Pakistani family.

3. Theoretical Framework

Life Course Studies is a comprehensive sociological perspective which had its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s, and in which a wide variety of 20th century diverse early forms of sociological work provided the foundation. Though it has no single theory, or originator, its development has been greatly influenced by a series of important individuals. Glen Elder has been a pioneering studies on life course transitions and his work has shown repeatedly that history matters to personal paths. Likewise, Nels Anderson focused on the detail work of breaking down society's 'social clock' and explaining how the march of society's expectations sets the stage for, for example, marriage and childbirth. Their wide-ranging studies of the effect of inequality on the

lives of individuals have illuminated important, if complex, contributions of Stanley Lieberman. They furthered the conversation by clearing up, how people actively create their own life and invest in the social production of reality. Anthony Giddens stressed the complex interactions between people and social systems in his 'structuration theory'--which stresses the crafting and shaping, and mutual shaping, in which people and social systems constantly interact. Life, according to Life Course Studies, is the progression through interrelated stages with opportunities and life processes with their respective difficulties and the early experience has a marked influence on life. Among other things, Stanley Lieberman has influenced the study of the relationship between social institutions and individual lives by drawing attention to the far reaching effects of inequality. Thomas Luckmann and Peter Berger offered more into the conversation by clarifying how people really work in shaping their lives and contribute in the pharmaceutical production of reality. For instance, Anthony Giddens made a 'structuration theory' happen, where he emphasized how complex interactions take place between people and social systems — where people are shaping and all the while being shaped. Life Course Studies explains that life is made of successive life stages with possibilities and difficulties interrelated, and that early experiences have strong influence on trajectory of life.

Individuals' decisions are influenced by social context (resources, conventions and expectations) but life paths remain flexible and are reworked through action and adaptation. It is to understand how important historical and cultural circumstances in people's lives are to their experiences and decision making. The dynamic nature of this discipline is never static, a dynamic discipline which continues to take new conceptual ground to address the material complexity of human development in its social dimensions as well as the temporal complexity. This study draws on Life Course Studies to offer an essential theoretical lens that allows for a prismatic view of how Pakistani youth engage in family planning decisions at critical junctures of their personal, professional, and educational transitions, despite the intervening imposition of social institutions and cultural norms.

4. Methodology

4.1: Description of Study Site:

The study was carried out at Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad. This educational institution was selected because it serves a student body that is diverse in terms of its regions of Pakistan.

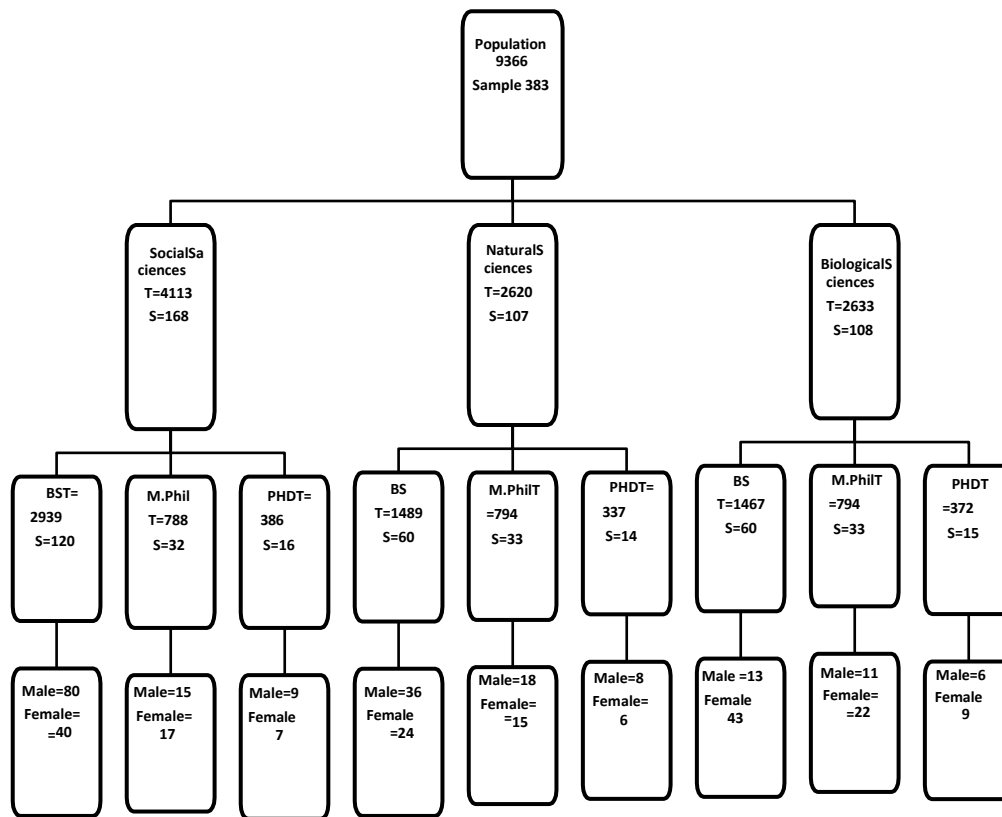
The university admits students on the basis of merit ensuring socio economic diversity from deprived communities. A culturally rich setting was chosen in order to be able to focus on a comprehensive snapshot of the youth population in Pakistan. In the study, specifically, Quaid-i-Azam University students and other educated people passing through higher education are explored in terms of their attitudes towards family planning.

4.2: Data and Sampling Technique:

For this study we obtained the total number of students in Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, 9,366 from Times Higher Education. The target population was sampled using a probability sampling design with a stratified technique to represent equal faculties, degree levels and gender. The representative sample size for each stratum was then calculated using the formula for stratified random sampling formula $\text{Total sample size} / \text{Entire Population} * \text{Population of subgroup}$. The total enrollment was used to determine a resulting sample size of 385, which represents the population of the study well.

Stratified Random Sampling Formula: $\text{Total Sample Size} / \text{Entire Population} * \text{Population of Subgroup}$

Figure 1: Sample Size of Quaid-I-Azam University, Islamabad



Source: Times Higher Education

4.5: Data Collection

In the data collection methodology, a comprehensive approach was adopted, employing a well-structured questionnaire that featured both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The researcher personally distributed the questionnaire, offering assistance as needed. The collected data underwent analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics, ensuring accurate and efficient handling for prompt evaluation. Descriptive statistics were applied to summarize the data, and inferential statistics facilitated generalization from the sample to the larger population.

4.6: Ethical Considerations:

In terms of ethical considerations, the study maintained a strong focus on upholding ethical standards throughout its duration. Rigorous measures were implemented to ensure the confidentiality of participant information. Administrative consent was obtained for participation, and participants provided written authorization, guaranteeing that their personal information

would be used exclusively for research purposes and would remain confidential, with no disclosure to external entities.

5. Results

5.1: Descriptive Statistics

The results highlight the importance of obtaining an education before starting a family, with the majority of respondents (70.4%) holding the view that family planning cannot be implemented without first finishing education. However, 23.6% have the opposite opinion, which may reflect differing opinions of when family planning should be implemented concerning schooling. Furthermore, 74.3% of respondents say they would rather have a nuclear family, indicating a general trend toward smaller, autonomous family units; nevertheless, 21.5% say they would rather have a joint family, indicating some variation in family choices.

Table 1:

Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)
Students' perception about parenting before education	70.4	23.6
Planning for nuclear family	74.3	21.5
Gap years needed after birth	69.9	25.2
Birth gap is important	78.6	18.4
One-to-two child policy is good	72.6	23.4
Planning for 1-2 children	79.7	15.4
Family planning is necessary	70.3	27.2

Upon deeper inspection, the data reveals some interesting patterns, like the over 70% of respondents who support a two-year birth gap, indicating a general desire for a balanced interval between pregnancies. Furthermore, 78.6% acknowledge the significance of birth spacing, demonstrating a common commitment to responsible parenting and the welfare of the family. In terms of family size, 72.6% support a policy that limits children to two, possibly due to financial or environmental reasons. This support is consistent with the 79.7% of respondents who want to have 1-2 children, indicating that the recommended policy may be applied in practice and that there is a relationship between support and anticipated family size.

In conclusion, the study not only confirms the widespread view that education is the most important factor before family planning, but it also indicates respondents' varied preferences for family size, spacing between births, and structure. These thorough results offer a thorough grasp of the principles and concerns influencing their views on family and parenting.

5.2: Inferential statistic

In this section, cross-tabulation tables are analyzed. The four variables controlled are Age, gender, residence, and faculty. Cross-tabulations of these variables are examined about the remaining variables.

Table 2: Cross-tabulation of Marriage Planning across Age Groups

Age	Do you plan for marriage?		Total
	Yes	No	
18-20	60.00%	40.00%	100.00%
21-23	68.80%	31.20%	100.00%
24-26	71.00%	29.00%	100.00%
27-29	73%	27%	100.00%
Total	67.90%	32.10%	100.00%

The table looks at the marriage intentions of students in various age groups. Respondents in the age ranges of 18–20, 21–23, 24–26, and 27–29 were asked if they planned to get married, and their answers were classified as "Yes" or "No." The age group of 27–29 had the largest percentage of students (73%) who were planning to get married, but other age group had lower percentages, with over 60% of students expecting to marry. This indicates a pattern that as students get older, a higher proportion of them declare their intention to get married. To summarize, the data shows that students are more likely to consider marriage as they become older, and they all believe in marriage to the same extent.

Table 3: Cross-tabulation of Marriage Delay and Perception across Age Groups

	Do you think your marriage is delayed?	
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Age	Yes	No	Total
18-20	60.00%	40.00%	100.00%
21-23	75.30%	24.70%	100.00%
24-26	74.50%	25.50%	100.00%
27-29	78.00%	22.00%	100.00%
Total	75.00%	25.00%	100.00%

The table displays a cross-tabulation and analysis of students' opinions regarding the postponement of marriage for various age groups. The data is divided into four age groups: 18–20, 21–23, 24–26, and 27–29. Students' answers are marked with "Yes" or "No" depending on whether they think their marriage is dragging on. Students in the 27–29 age group are most likely to believe that their marriage is stalling (78%), while students in the 18–20 age group are least likely to believe this (60%). In total, 75% of those surveyed feel that their marriage is taking longer than expected. This suggests that there is a growing knowledge and concern about delaying marriage as students get older.

Table 4: Cross-tabulation of Factors Delaying Marriage across Age Groups

Age	The main factor delaying marriage				Total
	Family Pressure	Low-income level	Completion of education	Any other	
18-20	25.00%	0.00%	25.00%	50.00%	100.00%
21-23	23.30%	38.30%	28.30%	10.00%	100.00%
24-26	20.60%	27.10%	45.80%	6.50%	100.00%
27-29	13.30%	30.00%	40.00%	16.70%	100.00%
Total	20.40%	30.30%	39.30%	10.00%	100.00%

The table is a summary of the variables affecting how various student age groups perceive marriage delays. Upon reviewing the comments on the principal factors contributing to the delay,

it is noteworthy that the largest proportion (i.e., 45%) originates from students in the 24-26 age range, who cite schooling as the primary factor. 39% of students, across all age categories, think that the primary cause of their marriage's postponement is their completion of education. Furthermore, thirty percent of students across multiple age groups relate the delay to low poverty. This indicates that respondents generally believe that pursuing education is a major reason why marriage is delayed, and a sizable portion of them also mention financial restrictions as a consideration.

Table 5: Cross-Tabulation of Children's Desire across Age Groups

Age	Desire children		Total
	Yes	No	
18-20	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%
21-23	94.80%	5.20%	100.00%
24-26	91.00%	9.00%	100.00%
27-29	92.70%	7.30%	100.00%
Total	92.50%	7.50%	100.00%

The association between the desire to have children and the age groups of students is depicted in the table. Interestingly, the largest percentage—exactly 100%—comes from the 18–20 age range, where every responder says they hope to become parents in the future. For the other age categories, a cumulative percentage of 92.50% across all age groups indicates that over 90% of students in each group show a wish to have children. This suggests that students of different ages have a consistent and strong desire to become parents in the future. In conclusion, the vast majority of students polled in all age groups expressed a desire to begin a family, highlighting a shared goal among them all to become parents.

Table 6: Cross-tabulation of Planned Family Size Across Age Groups

Age	Planned Children			Total
	1-2	3-4	5-above	
18-20	40.00%	60.00%	0.00%	100.00%
21-23	31.20%	39.00%	29.90%	100.00%
24-26	36.60%	40.70%	22.80%	100.00%
27-29	24.40%	43.90%	31.70%	100.00%
Total	33.20%	41.00%	25.70%	100.00%

The association between the number of children that students want to have in the future and their age group is displayed in the table. It's interesting to note that no age group shows a clear preference for a certain number of kids. But the largest percentage—60%—is found in the 18–20 age range, suggesting a propensity to plan for three to four children. Students in all age groups indicate a little greater interest in having 3–4 children than 1-2 or 5 and above. In conclusion, while there are differences between age groups, there is a general tendency toward a somewhat higher preference for planning three to four children, with the 18 to 20 age group exhibiting the largest percentage in this category.

Table 7: Cross-tabulation of Birth Gap Perception across Age Groups

Age	Birth Gap Necessary		Total
	Yes	No	
18-20	80.00%	20.00%	100.00%
21-23	67.50%	32.50%	100.00%
24-26	71.70%	28.30%	100.00%
27-29	77%	23%	100.00%
Total	68.70%	31.30%	100.00%

The table shows the relationship of the different age groups of the students and their opinions of the need for a birth gap. Notably, however, 80% of students in the youngest age group, 18–

20, think there should be a birth gap. More than 60 percent of students at all age groups agree with this view and have an overall consensus that a birth disparity is important. This means that younger people, i.e., the 18–20 age group have a better idea of family planning than the older people. Finally, the table shows that all students of all ages agree that there should be a birth gap, with younger students agreeing more strongly than older students.

Table 8: Cross-tabulation of Preferred Birth Gap Length across Age Groups

Age	Preferred Gap Length				Total
	1-2	3-4	5-6	6-above	
18-20	0.00%	60.00%	20.00%	20.00%	100.00%
21-23	44.20%	45.50%	9.10%	1.30%	100.00%
24-26	43.40%	46.20%	7.60%	2.80%	100.00%
27-29	34.10%	36.60%	29.30%	0.00%	100.00%
Total	41.40%	44.80%	11.60%	2.20%	100.00%

The relationship between the various age groups of students and their opinions about the required number of years between births is depicted in the table. The youngest age group, 18–20, is particularly noteworthy because 60% of students think a 3–4year delay is appropriate. Across all age categories, somewhat more students44.80%agree with this assessment. As age increases, the percentages fall, suggesting a declining tendency in the assumption that a certain number of years must pass between conception and birth. In conclusion, the data indicates that a greater proportion of younger studentsespecially those in the 18–20 age range—express the opinion that a 3–4-year gap is required and that this belief progressively declines with age.

In conclusion, the data from numerous tables show intriguing trends in the attitudes of students from varying age groups toward marriage, family planning, and motherhood. Students are more likely to consider marriage as they become older, with the 27–29 age group having the largest number of students (73%) who plan to get married. As people mature, there is a greater concern about delaying marriage, as seen by the 78% of respondents in the 27–29 age range who expressed this attitude.Studying becomes one of the main reasons why people wait to get married (45% of the 24-26 age group cite this as their reason). All age groups exhibit a high level of

desire for motherhood; among respondents in the 18–20 age group, 100% expressed a wish to have children. Planning for three to four children is the trend, while preferences for the number of children vary slightly; this is especially true for the 18 to 20 age group. Furthermore, younger people—particularly those in the 18–20 age range—show a greater understanding of family planning, as shown by the fact that 80% of them think a birth gap is necessary and 60% think a gap of three to four years is appropriate.

6. Discussion

The study's findings clearly show how Pakistani young, particularly those pursuing higher education, are beginning to see family planning differently. A strong consensus of 70.4% among the participants highlights the deeply embedded notion that obtaining an education is a necessary condition for family planning. This is consistent with the larger societal trend of an increasingly advanced average age at marriage, which deviates from customary practices (UNDP, 2022). This emphasizes that people realize that education is important, and that you shouldn't start a family until you've completed it. The 74.3 percent of respondents who said they preferred nuclear family structure is an indication of a persistent trend towards smaller, independent family units. This tendency (Khan & Ali, 2023) could be owing to several factors including cultural dynamics changing or economic factors. Furthermore, 72.6% of respondents preferred a family planning policy of a one to two child policy, suggesting that the respondents' preferences for family planning are being influenced by economic or environmental factors. However, this demonstrates that respondents are getting more involved in larger aspects of society (Quersh, 2020). A bit closer at the data reveals some subtle patterns, such as the 70% preference for a two year birth gap, a general desire for a balanced interval between pregnancies. The agreement that is shown in 78.6% of respondents that birth spacing is important implies a common agreement to responsible parenting and families. Moreover, the strong correlation (79.7%) between wish for a one-to-two-child policy and the intention of having 1-2 children shows the correspondence between a belief and intended family size (Abbas, 2020). The age groups are compared to see how marriage intentions are shifting. As marriage is universally held by beings, the 73% of people in the 27–29 age range who aspire to get married are first attesting that marriage is an age increment. Additionally, 75% of respondents said that they had delayed getting married, and 78% of respondents in the 27–29 age range confirmed that. That's indicative of the fact that

people are becoming more aware of the chance that differences in income and education may be the reason behind the wait for marriage (Ahmed & Naseem, 2019). Insight into the complex nature of these choices is gained by studying the variables which determine the postponement of marriage. The largest contributor to delay (45%) is education, consistent with the larger trends of higher educational attainment and its impact on evolving Pakistani conventional marriage patterns (Shah & Ali, 2019). Financial limitations (30%) indicate that financial and educational factors are mutually influencing factors in marriage postponement (Shah & Ali, 2019). All age groups share the same overall theme of wanting children, with 100% of respondents in the 18–20 age range indicating this desire. Over 90% of students in each age group indicate that they plan to start a family, demonstrating the continued consistency of this trend. The students who were polled all had a strong desire to become parents, which highlights the persistence of the cultural emphasis put on family life (Akhtar & Siddiqui, 2023). Although no age group shows a clear preference for having a certain number of children, there is a minor tendency towards preparing for three to four children, with the 18 to 20 age group exhibiting the greatest percentage at 60%. This implies that, while there may be differences between age groups, there is a general tendency towards a somewhat bigger family size. It might be a sign of shifting family dynamics and goals, which could be impacted by shifting social mores and financial circumstances (Haq & Aziz, 2022). The general agreement among students of all ages on the need for a birth gap—80% of them agreed that a birth gap was necessary—points to a greater understanding of family planning among younger people. As one becomes older, the assumption that a 3–4-year gap between births is necessary wanes, highlighting a generational shift in viewpoints. . The shift to culture towards taking interest in the use of responsible parental planning techniques, especially among younger people is evident from this (Zeba&Irum, 2018). The results of the poll are also set in the larger background of society in Pakistan. The largest group, the youth of the nation, are undergoing a dramatic change in how they think about marriage and family planning. This is a sign of changing sexual mores and autonomy of young people to make decisions – particularly for women – in the context of advancing age of marriage (Barich and Bielby, 2022). It's in line with the bigger picture of the society moving toward more personal autonomy in life choices. Due to Western ideas, conventional family patterns are changing among students at colleges and universities. In the case of Pakistani culture, this becomes apparent through students'

increasingly free and argentic choice of their spouses and family planning options (Clark and Ansell 2012). Which means family planning may be moving in the direction of a public shift toward more individual autonomy and decision making, especially among youn ger peop le. It focuses on the study of the variables that affect youth planning, and in this case we've seen how socialization plays a major role, how family expectations and society's norms have a great influence on how each one will choose to parent (Muneer & Hassan, 2022). The changing dynamics is shown in how young men and women are pressured differently. Other positive changes include women's acceptance of delayed marriage, and equality for women (Shah & Haq, 2020). This is telling us that societies, and those ideas around gender roles, are changing, allowing people to make the decisions in life they feel appropriate. Education is found to affect parenting and marriage decisions in ways that upturn old customs such as cousin weddings. Young men and women who decide to pursue higher education bring about traditional marriage patterns, which is characterized as compatibility, similar values, and career ambitions since we are getting hungrier and hungrier, literally and figuratively. Young adults' improved decision making capacity, especially in choosing spouses, creates more open communication and greater autonomy in family planning decisions (Rashid & Bhatti, 2018). This shows how education can earn people the change of becoming goals and choices on family planning. Employment trends, and by extension the gender gap, reveal the social pressure put on young women to marry and become mothers before they begin their path to a professional career. While this is seen as a positive change, financially independent women are better able to support the family economy, and feel more empowered in the home (Ashraf & Shah, 2019). Ashraf and Shah (2019) suggest that not only does financial independence lead to personal empowerment, but it also changes the ways in which financial independence affects family dynamics and decision-making processes as we transition towards a shifting dynamic.

The motivation for the research lies in the thorough analysis of family planning goals among young Pakistanis from different provinces and educational settings. The study's findings about the aspirations of other generations bring to the fore the importance of inclusive, pertinent, and relevant programs which resonate with today's aspiration bearing generation (Schwiter, 2011). This supports the fact that adequate family planning respondents should be provided to the young population that varies in terms of its region, geographies, science of education, and other

essential parameters. In essence, the study demonstrates how family planning is changing among young people in Pakistan in both a thorough and a complicated way. A number of interrelated factors influence the viewpoints and decisions made by the students polled, ranging from education, to gender dynamics, to cultural standards and to economic considerations. The research contributes to wider discussion about Pakistan's evolving norms and demographics, and thus allows for the development of targeted and informed family planning program interventions which will respond to the needs of young people to create a more welcoming and fulfilling future for Pakistani families.

6.1: Conclusion and Policy Suggestions

The study findings reveal a full window into how the Pakistani youth, particularly those who go on to get higher education, are changing their perspective on family planning. A lot of people surveyed agree that it's crucial to get your degree done before you start a family. This view is at variance from ordinary standards and is in keeping with wider cultural trends, evidenced by the increasing average age at marriage. Tampered with by a growing preference for a nuclear family structure, this acknowledged preference also reflects the tendency for smaller, autonomous family units. This tendency may have much to do with variable impacts based on shifting cultural dynamics, economic considerations or other factors. It also highlights the growing support for a one to two child policy which reflects a growing recognition that how family planning is chosen is impacted by financial or environmental factors. When you look closely at the data, you see that people prefer a two year birth gap, which suggests that in general there is a need for a balanced interval between pregnancies. The recognition of the importance of the birth spacing is a common dedication to conscientious parenting. This is further evidence of this commitment in terms of the relationship between the preparation for a lower family size and a one-to-two child policy. When we look at specific age cohorts we get a lot of insight into the changing landscape of marital intentions. The fact that age related increases in the likelihood of thinking about marriage means marriage is universally viewed positively by all age groups. However, it also admits to a delay in marriage and one that's simultaneous opens a window for a heightened consciousness and anxiety based on factors such as educational attainment and financial status in the delay of marriage. Insight into the complexity of these choices is given by the factors which affect the postponement of marriage. The schooling delay is consistent with

larger trends in education attainment, and their effect on changing customs surrounding marriage. Financial limitations are recognized as playing an important role in the relation between educational and financial factors in determining marital choices. The desire for children was recurring among students at all age categories, suggesting a shared goal. There are no clear trends by age group in how many kids they want, but there is a tendency to want a bit bigger family size. Students' agreement in general about a birth gap indicates that younger people are more aware of family planning. The belief in the need for a birth gap, in other words, declines as people get older — and this points to a generational shift in what people believe about responsible family planning measures. The results of the poll are read within a larger context of societal development in Pakistan. The largest group of the nation is the youth, who are experiencing a huge change in how they feel about marriage and family planning. It's a sign of social mores shifting and young adults getting more autonomy to make decisions as they reach adulthood — the rising age of marriage, especially for women. Changes in conventional family structures have been taking place, especially among students in universities and colleges especially where the impacts of international movements are obvious. This shift in Pakistani society has been indicative of a shift to a more independent and self-reliant student making decisions about marriage and family planning.

The survey looks at what the variables are affecting youth planning and how socialization, or family expectations and societal standards, play a large part in how each person chooses to parent. Two of these changing dynamics are highlighted by the pressures that young men and women face differently: positive trends in the direction of more gender equality and more acceptance of women's delayed marriage. That, in itself is a great sign on the roads in society where things consider regarding the gender roles are changing, thus the people have the freedom to take their own decision in life.

It is proven that education has a great deal of influence in changing parenting and marriage decisions, and in overturning old customs, such as cousin weddings. Young men and women are increasingly educated, and marrying according to compatibility, similar values and caring aspirations has become more traditional. Young adults' improved decision making, especially on the choice of spouse, greatly facilitates greater autonomy and open communication in family planning decisions. This is especially true for females. The fact that the current employment

trends have a gender gap, reveals the social pressure that young women are put under to put marriage and starting a family before embarking on a professional path. Yet positive changes are happening, as women are becoming able to participate in their family economy and feel more empowered within the family unit because of financial independence. Financial freedom therefore implies a changing dynamic in which family dynamics and decision making processes are also under the influence of financial freedom, and also helps in boosting personal empowerment. Taken together, the findings of the study provide a broad exposition of how family planning is transforming among young people in Pakistan. A number of interconnected factors such as education, gender dynamics, cultural standards, and the economics, influence the viewpoints and decisions that the students polled share. This research contributes to an ongoing conversation about the social and demographic transformations taking place in Pakistan and suggests how that larger conversation can inform well-targeted and well-informed family planning program interventions that respond to the needs of young people and set them on a path to a more welcoming, satisfying future for Pakistani families.

a. Policy suggestions:

Pakistan continues to have larger families compared to global averages, despite declining fertility rates. Effective family planning programs must continue to emphasize fewer families to support economic growth and keep up with global trends. This is especially important in rural areas where social pressure to have larger families is still strong. Increasing the presence and activity of family planning groups in rural regions can help them function more effectively. Promote the advantages of sensible family planning and dispel the myths that rural adolescents often hold regarding smaller families. All categories, but especially rural students, show a positive trend toward smaller families, which emphasizes the role that educational institutions play in raising public knowledge of family planning. To further cement this encouraging development, government initiatives should be directed at rural educational institutions.

Dispel the myth that family planning is a "Western agenda" by enlisting the aid of religious authorities and advancing social norms that, when seen in the context of regional values and customs, applaud smaller families.

By enabling local communities to forbid child marriages and place a high priority on female education, we may combat early marriage, a major factor contributing to population rise.

By highlighting the equal worth of daughters and sons in society and through media campaigns, one can counteract son preference, another factor determining family size. Investigate the long-term effects of smaller families further, taking into account possible problems such as elder care in smaller units, family dissolution, and labor shortages. Future policy and social support initiatives will be informed by this.

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